

Santa Klutz
By Orblover
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I stood at the windows in the family room looking at the snow falling. Slowly, it erased the tracks of the kids as they had played themselves out that day. Only the lights from the Christmas tree and the full moon reflecting in the yard lit the room.

I took another sip of the last of my 16 year old, port wood finished Balvanie. I sighed in remembrance of Christmases past and allowed the nectar of the Highlands to warm me and relax me.

“I’m glad they went down early tonight,” the joy of my life said as she wrapped her arm around my waist and settled in to share the view.

“I played with them hard so they world.” I felt proud of myself spending the day out in the snow with the kids. A rare day that I didn’t let work distract me.

“The snow people are extraordinary. A whole family!” I could feel her pride through our mutual contact points.

“Dad’s chest ball damn near killed me lifting it. I swear the kids put lead in it.” I did my best to flex my tired muscles.

“Maybe you’re just older.” She bumped my hip.

“Hell, I’m only forty.” Where were my muscles, they were there earlier in the day.

“By five and a half years.” I could feel her smirk in our contact, I didn’t need to look at her face.

“Oh, let’s not go there. Instead, it’s surprising early for us. The kids are down, all the hidden presents are under the tree, it’s at least six hours before we get bothered...” To reinforce my point, I gave her wonderful ass a good squeeze.

She jumped and then pushed against my hand. Wiggling those buns of steel in a sweet shimmy. Sighing after downing a healthy sip of her Amaretto Sour, “I keep feeling like I’ve forgotten something.”

“We emptied the attic. I found presents from two years ago, so I know I looked. The basement is clean. What else?”

“Something.” She always had a nagging feeling about everything. Distraction was called for.

I turned her to me, wrapped my arms around her as she put hers outside mine. She would try for my neck, but she’s not quite tall enough and still holding her glass.

The kiss started with just our lips lightly touching. Once, twice, as soft as the newly fallen snow outside, as infinite as the stars. The third touch we held. A half second and her lips opened. Her

tongue met mine as we began a very familiar dance. My left hand was suddenly busy with the buns of steel.

She moaned into my mouth, "Oh, that's so nice."

Her hand was rubbing the outside of my pants causing my excitement to mount.

We broke our kiss and before we could move to the next level, she gasped.

"I remember what I forgot!" Who just suddenly let the air out of my balloon?

"Tell me it's not bicycles." I still had nightmares about THAT Christmas Eve spent assembling three bikes. It was another of those forgotten things that she remembered at 1 AM. I was just crawling into bed when the kids got up. My second daughter noted that day that Santa cussed, she heard him. No shit! "You promised me, no more 'some assembly required' bikes."

"No, not bikes. It's a trampoline." I swear her voice bounced like a kid on one. She smiled at me, too sweetly. Rubbing her hands on my chest and sliding down slowly, "It's out in the lawn shed." Her hands found my belt buckle and continued south. "I'll make it up to you later."

"A trampoline?" Okay, okay, this is just a joke. Right? I hope. "Please tell me this is a cruel joke." Alright, cruel came out, but I felt that way.

Unphased, she continued her pitch, "the man at the store said it was easy to put together. You can put it up in the side yard by our bedroom. That way the kids can't see you out their windows."

"In sub-zero weather, in a snow storm?"

"I'll warm you up when you are done." She batted her eyelashes at me. Damn her.

I drained the rest of my precious whisky. I'm sure I might have vocalized my current feelings of misfortune. I drug on my warm clothes, snow boots, heavy coat, hat, and heaviest gloves. Still grumbling, I headed out to retrieve the instruction sheet. Provided it had one.

My first step into the yard I sank to my knees. Two feet of snow already. Great. The journey out to the shed was slow, fighting the deep snow all the way. As I unlocked the door, I realized in my haste I had forgotten a flashlight. Come spring I planned to run power out to the shed and light it, but no lights now.

I kept the shed clean for the most part. The main floor area was empty except the lawn tractor which I kept to the left coming in the door. So I went right. And I went right down. My numb feet not even feeling "The Thing on The Floor" I tripped over. No indication until my knees crunched down on it.

I really felt it when I went head first into the upright stack of yard tools. All those lovely rakes, shovels, and such I had collected over the years. Of course, they came careening down on me. Note to self: never store a shovel blade up again, no matter how much I want to protect my grandfather's legacy from rust. It found my kidney, I think. At least the edge came down square on that part of my back.

Laying there, face down on the floor, my legs bent awkwardly around "The Thing on the Floor" with a

motley collection of long handled yard instruments scattered about and over me, I thought how fortunate I kept the business ends of the sledge hammers and picks down. I suddenly realized I had the taste of copper in my mouth. Okay, my mouth and perhaps my nose is bleeding. My knees, four surgeries from football injuries later, were announcing they were joining the pain party. My back was loudly voting for a change of position because the current one was not conducive to my long term health. And, where that shovel had landed was making itself known in no uncertain terms.

At least I had found the trampoline.

It took a bit to get my hands under me after sloughing off the stack on my back. I managed to retrieve my legs from “the Thing on the Floor.”

Standing up was a new experience. My joints were already stiffening. My hands and feet were getting very cold. I moved to the lawn tractor and found the headlight switch.

For exactly one split second, the light was blinding and welcomed. Then it dimmed into darkness. I knew the battery had just given up the ghost.

I stood in a tangle of dangerous things on the floor and considered my next move. What was my next move? Could I get out of this suddenly treacherous shed alive? I still had “the Thing on the Floor” to assemble. Damn.

Slowly, I turned in a big circle and located “the Thing” and managed to step over it. I remembered I had a small flashlight on my tool bench and carefully edged down “the Thing” until I felt the counter.

I took off my right glove to feel around, carefully, for the light. My hand was quickly getting numb from the cold making it awkward to tell a screwdriver handle from the small light.

My hand found itself around what might have been the light, so I slid up pushing for the switch with my thumb. About the time my thumb let my brain know it wasn't finding a switch, my memory screamed something about a carpet knife I had left on the bench after sharpening it a month ago.

I went into multi-processing mode. My mouth began swearing curses at the universe. If Santa had been about to land on the roof, surely he had just marked our house off his list. My writer's mind wondered if “shit-a-goddamn” was a proper semantic construct and what its meaning was. Somehow, my right thumb managed to separate from the cold, sharp steel of the knife. A portion of that steel trap that holds my ears apart was beginning to calculate the damage. My left hand, in anticipation of my imminent collapse from pain, slammed down on the bench and found the on switch to the errant flashlight.

For second time that night I had trouble adjusting to the sudden brightness. Yet the light did cause singular focus on my right thumb. At first, there was a slight line, as if drawn by a fine pen, bisecting the pad. As my panic, and thus blood pressure, rose a trickle of dark liquid began to flow. Which only caused my panic to rise. And my blood pressure. And the flow.

My peripheral vision caught sight of a cloth on the bench. Grabbing it, I wrapped it around my thumb to staunch the building flood. The cold must have impacted my sense of smell, for it was only as the cloth was around the throbbing digit did my nose register the scent of cleaning fluids. The very same I had used said cloth to wipe up last time in the shed. Exactly at the same moment, my nervous system

registered the extreme alkaline overload I had just placed on a raw, open wound.

“For Unholy Corn Kernels!” At least that's what I think I yelled. Or maybe just the acronym.

I'm positive I was praising all the known wonders of the universe as I ripped the rag off my hand, grabbed the light, ran out the shed door, and shoved my thumb into the snow.

As the pain went from “expletive deleted” to excruciating to throbbing, I was able to collect myself. I needed a plan. A plan that didn't include me running around the backyard screaming my head off. Although, in the moment...

“Get the instructions.” I told the snow slowly turning darker around my hand. “Get back in the house. Get warm. Get help.” Workable. “Oh, find something to stem the blood.” Okay. Meanwhile, the snow around my thumb was looking a lot like a cherry Italian ice. I had clean shop towels on the first shelf over the bench. At the back of the bench. Over “the Thing on the Floor.”

“I can do this,” I told the falling snow. At least I know where there is something that can open “the Thing.”

Gathering my courage, I went into the shed to do battle. I focused the light on my first goal – the clean shop towels. I stepped gingerly over “the Thing on the Floor.” Well, almost gingerly. I guess the cold and whisky was playing a part now to slow me down.

As my boot came down, it found a thatching rake. Just right. As the curved, sharp tines cut into my left boot, the handle levered up and smacked me in the head. Note to self: NEVER lead with your head when stepping over “the Thing on the Floor.”

“My Father Plays Dominoes Better than Your Father.” I'm sure that's what I said. I wouldn't want my kids to hear me say anything else.

Somehow, I grabbed a new, clean shop towel and wrapped it around my thumb. Amazing, there were stars inside the shed!

I levered the thatching rake out of my boot, hoping that any bleeding that might be there was being handled by my sock.

Focus. Instructions. House. Warmth.

Grabbing the carpet knife, knowingly this time, in my now numb bare hand, I slit the top of “the Thing of the Floor.” Perhaps harder than I intended. It would appear that I cut my pants. Nice pair of jeans, too. Almost new. No matter. I ripped open the top and immediately found the instruction book. Carefully, I placed the carpet knife in its place on the tool board and prepared to exit the shed.

It seemed harder to get over the box this time. My left leg feeling a little heavy. Thanks rakes and shovels!

My glove was missing. Too bad. I'll find it later.

I should pick up the tools and restack them. Later.

I should put the charger on the tractor battery. Later.

“I have a box to attack! NOW!” I’m sure the bugs in the shed were impressed with my display of determination.

Inside. Warmth. Bandages. Planning time! I was a driven man as I slowly followed my footprints back to the house. My right foot felt like lead. My left leg was throbbing. My right thumb was preparing to file for divorce. “But I have the Instructions!” I’m sure the snowflakes were paying rapt attention to me. “The Thing on the Floor” was soon to be history.

I got to the patio off our bedroom, where the hot tub sits bubbling moneys away. Slowly I opened the door to a small mudroom where we keep our robes and towels. It has a vinyl floor to handle the dripping water.

“What took you so long?” Before I could answer, “I think we should wait to put the trampoline up.” Then she saw me. And screamed, “Oh My God! What happened?”

“I...” was she turning down the lights, do we have a dimmer in here? “I...” Now she was shaking the floor. “I got... the... instructions...” She faded away just as she seemed to get taller.

My world was bouncing. Badly. I tried to tell my wife to stop shaking the house.

“Male... forty-five years old... multiple puncture wounds... loss of blood... concussion...”

Huh? Stop shining that bright light in my eyes. Why is someone trying to hold my eyelids open. I want to sleep. I tried to tell them. I think I forgot how. They went away, thankfully.

Another really bright light. My eyes were still closed. No way I’m opening them, even if I could figure out how. “At least two pints, must have caught an artery in the leg...” What are they talking about. Lots of people around. “The concussion worries me, but not as much as the kidney...” Oh, steak and kidney pie. Sounds good. They went away too.

“Merry Christmas, Daddy...” was whispering in my ear. It sounded like my eldest daughter. What was she doing up? Trying to sneak down to the presents early and then claiming she tried to wake us?

“Wrarcajik...” Why wasn’t my voice working. Hell, nothing was working. I couldn’t move. Was my wife playing some bondage game? Not in front of the kids! I started to try to get loose.

“Sweetie, calm down. You’re in the hospital. Please calm down.” Her voice was very soothing. I like my wife’s voice.

“Grack... mmph...”

“Don’t try to talk. You have tubes down your throat.”

“Zumph...”

“It’s okay, baby. Everything is going to be alright. The doctor will be here soon. You’ve been in

surgery for a while.”

“Ther... garh... Eeee?”

“Yes, surgery. Your kidney was bleeding internally. How, we don't know. You lost a lot of blood between that, your foot, and your leg. Your nose is broken and your thumb took seven stitches. What happened?”

“Than... Ta... Cause...”

“Santa Claus?”

I nodded my head.

“Santa Klutz might be more appropriate,” said the doctor as she came into the room.

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Theme Song for Santa Klutz (Sung to the Tune of Jingle Bells)

By Tekla W.

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Sirens blaring,
Sirens blaring,
Blaring all the way,
Oh what fun it is to ride in an ambulance today, eh?

Gushing blood,
Feeling faint,
I can't fell my legs,
I shouldn't have covered the Christmas tree with all the flocking paint.

Passing out,
See the light,
Want to go its way.
Here my wife call my name, guess I'm here to stay.

Got some blood,
Stitches too,
Going to be OK.
The traction bed looks like a sled, Merry Christmas Day!